



WISEWOMAN

Success Story 1 Vermont *Ladies First* Program Helps Long-Time Smoker Stop for Good

Location Burlington, Vermont

Focus Empower women to improve their heart health by quitting smoking and making healthy changes in their diet.

Strategy *Ladies First* staff members encouraged Brenda to quit smoking, helped her find ways to cope with nicotine cravings, and worked with her to set healthy goals for losing weight.

Early Successes Encouragement from Vermont WISEWOMAN *Ladies First* staff helps women to stay focused on the benefits of quitting smoking and making healthy choices. *Ladies First* staff members empowered Brenda by helping her set achievable goals and letting her know they cared about her success. This support gave her the confidence she needed to quit smoking and improve her diet.

Brenda's commitment to giving up smoking and making healthy changes will set a powerful example for her 16-year-old daughter and her co-workers. Brenda has been smoke-free since April 2004.

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Vermont *Ladies First* Program Helps Long-Time Smoker Stop for Good

After smoking for more than 20 years and trying to quit twice, Brenda (not her real name) knew she wanted to stop smoking for good. Last year, she watched her stepmother die of emphysema, and then learned that a co-worker had lung cancer. Most importantly, she did not want her 16-year-old daughter to start smoking. Initially Brenda feared she would gain weight if she quit. But the Vermont *Ladies First* program gave her the support and resources she needed to quit smoking successfully.

Brenda joined the *Ladies First* program more than 2 years ago after seeing it advertised on TV. She was thrilled to be able to get free cervical cancer screening. She did not have health insurance at the time, and she had not been getting regular health checkups because she could not afford to pay for the doctor visit.

Brenda's doctor informed her that the *Ladies First* program provides free access to a nutritionist in the local health department. So she started working with Jeanne Lickwar, a registered dietician with the Burlington Health Department, to try to lose weight. The second time they met, Jeanne brought up smoking, and Brenda said she wanted to quit, but was not ready. "Then I read some materials that talked about the benefits of quitting smoking," Brenda says. "I told myself 'Now I'm ready.'"

Jeanne encouraged Brenda to quit by suggesting ways she could keep her mind off smoking. She also referred Brenda to the Vermont Quit Line and told her how to participate in the QuitBucks program, which covers 100% of the cost of nicotine replacement therapy.

In Brenda's Words

"I tried the Quit Line before, but nobody told me about QuitBucks. The counseling helped, but it was not enough. Getting the patch really made a big difference for me. My urge to smoke is bad sometimes, and the patch helps take the edge off. I wouldn't be able to afford it without QuitBucks.

"Jeanne made it easier for me to quit smoking. She gave me confidence and support. I've used her ideas about things to do instead of picking up a cigarette. She told me to walk at lunch, drink lots of water, and find something to do with my hands at home. I'm drawing now instead of smoking. She also kept me focused by reminding me why it was good for my health and good for my daughter if I quit. She let me know that I had places to go when I needed help."

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—Brenda
WISEWOMAN participant

The Vermont *Ladies First* Program

In 2003, the *Ladies First* program began offering screenings for heart disease risk factors such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and tobacco use. *Ladies First* allows women to learn more about heart healthy eating from a nutritionist, join a local group that helps women fit activity into their daily lives, and quit smoking with counseling and free patches or gum.

The *Ladies First* program staffers use *A New Leaf...Choices for Healthy Living* manual to guide women through lifestyle changes. They identify health issues each woman is willing to work on, and together they set reasonable and achievable goals at each visit.

Importance of Success

Brenda has been smoke-free since April 2004. She is still working to lose weight, and her goal is to stay smoke-free and lose weight at the same time. Jeanne is encouraging Brenda to eat a diet based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines, including lots of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Jeanne also is helping Brenda build her meals around healthy food she can afford. In addition, she is asking Brenda to eat three healthy meals a day, not one or two, and to exercise more to increase her energy expenditure. Jeanne gave Brenda a pedometer to

track her activity and a walking exercise video she can use at home. Brenda is now walking 2 miles every day.

Lessons Learned

- Programs like *Ladies First* are important tools for addressing risk factors for chronic diseases such as heart disease. When Brenda joined the *Ladies First* program, she was at risk for developing heart disease, because she was overweight and she smoked. Joining *Ladies First* helped her address both of these risk factors.
- Access to low- or no-cost services can encourage behavior change. Brenda learned about the QuitBucks program through *Ladies First*. Having access to free nicotine replacement therapy made it much easier for her to quit smoking.
- A supportive staff was important in helping Brenda quit smoking. The *Ladies First* staffers encouraged Brenda to quit, helped her set healthy goals, and let her know they cared about her success. This support gave Brenda the confidence she needed to quit smoking.